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EPA awards $2.5 million to Arizona to improve surface water quality

SAN FRANCISCO – The Environmental Protection Agency awarded $2.5 million to the State of Arizona for projects to help restore water quality in the state's polluted water bodies. With an additional $1.6 million leveraged by the state for these activities, more than $4 million is available this year to improve surface water quality.

Recent water quality data shows that a significant percentage of surface waters in Arizona are listed as impaired, or polluted, by the state. Extrapolating from Arizona's 2012 surface water assessment, which focused on a portion of the state's lakes and streams, 28 percent of stream miles and 74 percent of lake acres do not meet water quality standards. Water quality standards vary depending on how the water is used – from full body contact standards for waters designated for swimming to aquatic and wildlife standards for waters supporting fish and wildlife habitat. In Arizona, *E. coli* bacteria, metals, pesticides and fertilizers are the top sources of water pollution to surface water, such as rivers and lakes.

"EPA has invested over $16 million in Arizona surface waters since 2009," said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's Regional Administrator for the Pacific Southwest. "For the benefit of all Arizonans, we need to protect and improve these resources, all the more precious in times of drought."

"These funds will allow ADEQ and our partners around the state to restore water quality in some of the most special areas in Arizona," said Henry Darwin, Director Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. "Our relationship with EPA is vital in addressing the challenges the state faces in water bodies and we are devoted to processes like this, which result in positive outcomes."

Most surface water pollution in Arizona comes from "nonpoint sources." Runoff from irrigation, storms, recreational areas, such as golf courses, and agricultural lands flows over and through the ground, transporting natural and man-made pollutants into streams, lakes, rivers and wetlands. In contrast, a "point source" is any single identifiable source of pollution from which pollutants are discharged, such as a pipe, ditch or factory. These discharges are restricted by State or federal permits.

The Arizona Non-Point Source Program invests a significant portion of these funds in communities to achieve on-the-ground water quality benefits. One example is a project in the Upper Santa Cruz River (Mexico border to Sapori Wash) watershed to work with the community to reduce the most significant bacteria pollution sources in the watershed. Other focus watersheds for this funding include Oak Creek, Granite Creek, the San Pedro River and the San Francisco and Blue rivers (all focusing on *E. coli* issues), as well as the Little Colorado River Watershed (sediment) and the Boulder Creek watershed (zinc, lead, and arsenic).

Last year a portion funds were used in Sedona for a variety of projects to reduce nonpoint pollution from Sedona washes, including a community-driven effort to remove trash, litter, feces and diapers from the Oak Creek corridor. Outreach and education projects focused on responsible stewardship of Oak Creek and continuation of the highly successful Oak Creek Ambassadors program which educates visitors about the importance of keeping Oak Creek clean and supports collection of *E. coli* data.

The EPA also recently approved Arizona's Nonpoint Source Management Plan, which outlines approaches for achieving water quality improvements in the state over the next five years. Highlights include accelerating project restoration timeframes, prioritizing polluted watersheds, and committing to measurable water quality goals such as improving water quality in 50% of monitored waters. The plan builds upon a previous 5-year plan, making several key improvements to help restore impaired waters, and protect unimpaired and healthy waters.

For more information on funding announcements and to read the final NPS Plan, please visit the ADEQ website atazdeq.gov/environ/water/watershed

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